Saint Mary’s University GPDE 5256A

Wikis, Podcasts, and Online Learning for K-12 Classrooms

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Part I:

Throughout the web 2.0 class, my knowledge and understanding of a 21st century learner, using web tools, and professional development in the digital age have changed considerably. I am now looking for ways to use technology in my classroom not as supplementation, but as an innovative powerful tool. I am also open to using different web tools to help my students not only grasp the material, but use them as organizational tools, and many other methods to connect with others to form and broaden their knowledge base.

The definition of a 21st century learner differs from person to person, but the one thing that keeps coming across with most views is that a 21st century learner must be able to collaborate, be independent thinkers, and learn how to work in groups. With the idea of technology all around our students, we have the opportunity to have the students be creative and work with others even outside of the classroom on group work and independent thinking. My view of the 21st century learner is on track with most, and I feel that technology can foster a greater understanding of the subjects being taught and another tool to foster collaboration and teamwork with others. The 21st century learner has the ability that others have not had, and that is almost an endless wealth of resources available to them; the challenge for the students and also teachers is to be able to guide each other to finding legitimate, useful information to increase our skills, not bog them down with a ton of information that will never be utilized.

Being a one-to-one school and learning about all of the online resources that can help facilitate the students and their learning, can impact my classroom greatly. I have started implementing basic online tools last year that were only on a supplemental level, but reading articles and learning how to utilize the technology in a more creative way will help me utilize the technology not on a supplemental way, but in a powerful way to influence deeper level thinking and learning.

Part II:

I work as an 8th grade social studies teacher in Watertown-Mayer Middle School. Our school is one-to-one with the iPads, so all of our students are 21st century learners, now it is my job to help facilitate their learning with using the technology to their best abilities.

Last year I used Schoology mostly as a supplemental tool with putting the textbook, worksheets, and study guides online. Next year, I plan to utilize Schoology with exit quizzes to have a quick assessment of the students learning throughout different units. I also will use Schoology for a daily blog on a ten minute CNN Student News video clip. With the blogging feature on Schoology, I am able to have the students’ posts visible to others, so they will be able to read feedback from other students to gain a different perspective and more insight.

Another online tool that I would like to utilize is Twitter. I currently have a Twitter account, but do not use it to its fullest capabilities. I would like to get all of the kids set up on Twitter and following a list that I come up with. I have been thinking of what this would do for their connections to things globally. If they are connected with people from other countries, influential people in government, and even news sites, it will help them gain knowledge of what is happening around them.

I also do an end of the year conflict paper that the students choose from a pre-determined list that I provide them to pick from. With the iPads for each student, I plan on having the students research their own determined topic and write their research paper on the topic that they picked with my approval. When they have picked their own topic, they can choose how they would like to do the project; they can write a paper, do a PowerPoint or Prezi, make a video recording, or any other method that they feel would work for their determined topic. This would allow for the students to use choices and come up with their own creative way of working on the project. I feel that this would implement the highest level of Blooms Taxonomy with giving choices and having the students’ implement higher level thinking.

There are a number of different things that I am going to try next year with technology, but I am only scratching the surface of what is capable, and there will be plenty of things that will also be trial and error. Some of the roadblocks that I see for next year will be getting the students to buy into some of the projects, and also spending some of the time before hand to set up accounts, passwords, and other troubleshooting problems that always occur when working with technology. I am hoping not to take things out of my curriculum to implement technology, but to become more efficient with what I am already doing to create a 21st century learning environment within my classroom.

Part III:

I plan on using technology on a daily basis, as I did last year, but on a deeper level. I want to see what the kids are capable of, and let them use their creativeness to find the best ways for each student to understand the material that we are covering. I will monitor the students’ progress with the daily blog, and also unit exit slips, which could be a couple times throughout the unit, or everyday if I see the students, are having difficulty grasping the material. Throughout each unit, I will be able to monitor their progress with the exit slips, formative, and summative assessment as needed with each unit. Because of the iPads, there is instant feedback on the exit slips that I can provide for each student to let them know what standards they were proficient in and others that they may have struggled with. In order for this to be successful, I need to make sure that I am providing immediate feedback to each student and holding him or her accountable for learning and understanding each standard. I will have the learning objectives or targets of each unit on the board, so the students will know what is expected of them, and if they can in fact tell me at the end of the unit if they clearly understand the unit objective. If the student does not understand the learning objective, then it will be a perfect time to utilize other online resources to help the students’ master that objective and possibly retake lesson quizzes or tests if needed.

With the changes made to websites and apps on a constant basis, I will be sure to continually search for best practices and use other teachers in the building to make sure I am using the technology in the best way possible. We have a technology committee that runs technology sessions in the morning that will help continue my education with technology and implementation.

Part IV:

Reading about the 21st century classroom, and figuring out how to model my own classroom, I have found that it is not enough to just have technology within your classroom, but to use it in a powerful way. “Simply adding technology is not sufficient to address the changing nature of instruction” (Clemmons, 2013). I need to make sure I am not just supplementing technology as a different way to present the same information, but using technology to empower each student and have different methods of getting kids to master the content.

Another big idea that I came across was blogging in the classroom. I have already tried blogging, but did not see the deeper purpose of blogging, other than changing an old method of journaling. While reading, I found a site that demonstrated the purpose of blogging and how it makes the kids grow. It says that “any student can communicate in the blog, they question and challenge each others thinking, leading to deeper and more meaningful interaction than previously afforded during individual journaling” (learning and leading with technology, 2005).

Blogging allows the students to gain different perspective on the same topics, and allows students the chance to share their own opinions without raising their hands and be embarrassed to speak up. I have seen this process work very well throughout my classroom with some of the louder boys in my class, and some of the quieter girls not wanting to speak up; blogging has given them the opportunity to voice their opinions without the fear of some of their peers teasing or ridiculing them.

The next three things that I have really been thinking about in my classroom were group work, choices, and motivation. I feel that these things really go hand-in-hand, so I started doing some research to see what some of the best methods are. I feel that with technology, the students should have more of a choice on how they present their knowledge of the content, not the formal assessments that we are constantly giving the students. What I have found out about choice is that it is not a cure all, but if you are using these three tools, it can greatly increase motivation. These three things have the potential to positively influence motivation and achievement levels “a sense of control, a sense of purpose, and a sense of competence” (Ohiorc.org, 2010). In giving the students the power to choose, it gives them a sense of responsibility and ownership. I have always done my best in my class to give the students’ choices, but next year, plan on giving the students their own choice on given assignments and projects. This will hopefully increase their motivation and ownership.

In social studies, I do a lot of group projects, and always go back and fourth on picking the groups for them, then letting them pick for themselves. I found throughout all of the reading, that groups will succeed as long as you have clearly defined roles, and make sure that it is not delegated, but cooperative group work. “In order for true collaboration to happen, students must be able to communicate diplomatically” (McDowell, 2009). The students need to understand their roles and communicate effectively if they are to succeed and actually gain something from the project that they are working on together.

With all of the new technology that is available to us as teachers, it is important to keep adapting to the ever-changing world and grow daily. If we are continually doing the same things and just “pulling from the old file cabinet”, we are doing our students a disservice. We need to continually change and keep our subject matter engaging and relevant in the digital 21st century world. We are here to make our students global citizens and to prepare them for the new age world that is ever changing.

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